

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 27, 2017

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

Reports that a significant percentage of recent appointees at USDA do not meet guidelines set forth by the Office of Personnel Management, and in some cases completely lack relevant experience, are quite disturbing and require explanation.

When you testified before the House Committee on Agriculture earlier this year, you stated: "My goal, and I have stated internally and externally, is to make you, as the Committee on Agriculture here in the House, proud of the way the USDA is run." As Members bound to ensuring USDA, and every federal agency, is responsive and capable of fulfilling its duties to our constituents and communities, we urge you to explain how the appointment of unqualified, political staff to the agency could make members of the House proud.

We are particularly concerned about appointments to the USDA's Foreign Agriculture Service, the USDA's Agriculture Marketing Service, and the Natural Resource Conservation Service. It is our understanding that appointments have been made to these agencies without ensuring that they have the relevant experience. It is troubling that these unqualified appointees are being assigned senior positions where they will influence policy decisions and technical matters that have an impact felt across the nation.

The fact that these appointees do not demonstrate the necessary subject expertise, and have merely worked on political campaigns, demonstrates a disturbing hiring practice at the USDA. The people who work with the USDA and utilize the agency's programs deserve better. As Secretary, you are aware of the critical economic needs of rural America. You are tasked with managing the Department in a way that will lead to positive outcomes for the American people, which requires having the best possible staff. We request that you respond promptly with a detailed explanation outlining how your current appointees are qualified. If you are unable to provide this information, we request that you provide a plan to replace unqualified staff with competent and experienced professionals capable of serving the mission of the USDA.

Sincerely,



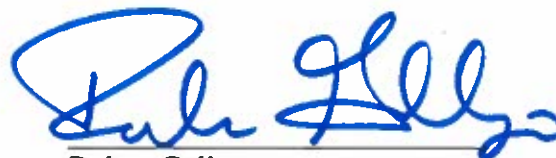
Tom O'Halleran
Member of Congress



Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress



Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress



Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress



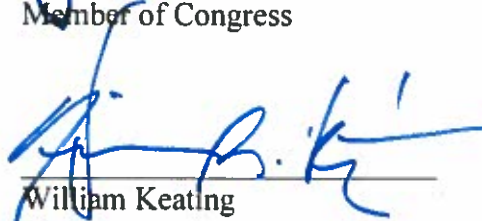
Raúl Grijalva
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



William Keating
Member of Congress